

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2821

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 4305

EXDIS

FOR S/CCT

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EINV, ASEC, PINS, VE

SUBJ: NIEHOUS KIDNAPPING

REF: STATE 089190

1. WE HAVE NOTHING OF SIGNIFICANCE TO ADD TO WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN REPORTED. O-I MUST NOW DECIDE WHAT IF ANY RESPONSE IT WILL MAKE TO THE KIDNAPPERS' DEMAND THAT THE COMPANY PETITION THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR FOR PERMISSION TO PUBLISH THE TWO COMMUNIQUEES AND STAND READY TO PAY A SUBSTANTIAL RANSOM. THE QUESTION WE HAVE FORESEEN FROM THE OUTSET OF THIS AFFAIR MAY NOW ARISE: WHAT CAN OR WILL THE USG DO TO PREVAIL ON THE GOV TO ALTER ITS POLICY AGAINST ALLOWING THE COMPANY TO MEET THE KIDNAPPERS' DEMANDS?

2. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE GOV IS NOT PREPARED TO PERMIT PUBLICATION IN VENEZUELA NOR TO ACQUIESCE IN THE PAYMENT OF RANSOM. A USG APPEAL FOR A SOFTENING OF THAT STAND WOULD SERIOUSLY UNDERMINE THE CREDIBILITY OF OUR OWN POLICY AND UNDOUBTEDLY PROVE FUTILE IN ANY CASE. AT SOME POINT THE KIDNAPPERS MAY AGAIN MAKE PRIVATE CONTACT WITH THE COMPANY. O-I WILL THEN HAVE TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO ATTEMPT A CLANDESTINE RANSOM PAYMENT CONTRARY TO THE GOVERNMENT'S WISHES. I BELIEVE WE MUST TAKE THE POSITION THAT THE DECISION IN SUCH AN EVENT WOULD BE O-I'S TO MAKE, BUT THAT WE WOULD URGE THE COMPANY TO INFORM THE GOV IMMEDIATELY AND CONFORM TO ITS INSTRUCTIONS.

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3. IT IS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT LYNCH WAS OPPOSED TO PUBLICATION OF THE INITIAL COMMUNIQUE OR TO ANY OTHER CONCESSIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF A FIRM COMMITMENT FROM THE KIDNAPPERS TO RELEASE NIEHOUS. HE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT BACK INTO CHARGE OF THE CASE IN THE WAKE OF THE FIASCO ATTENDANT ON THE DECISION TO GO AHEAD AND PUBLISH.

4. WE CAN FULLY UNDERSTAND O-I'S FEELING OF FRUSTRATION AND HELPLESSNESS. WE DO NOT BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THE COMPANY HAS AVAILABLE TO IT ANY EFFECTIVE MEANS OF INDEPENDENT ACTION. THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SAFETY OF MR. NIEHOUS RESTS WITH THE GOV AND O-I HAS NO REAL ALTERNATIVE TO COOPERATION WITH THE VENEZUELAN AUTHORITIES. WE WOULD URGE THAT THE COMPANY GIVE CAREFUL CONSIDERATION TO THE LEVEL OF ITS REPRESENTATION HERE. HAVING A REPRESENTATIVE ON THE SPOT WHO COULD SPEAK WITH AUTHORITY TO THE GOV IN AN EMERGENCY MIGHT AT SOME POINT BECOME A CRITICAL FACTOR. THE PRESENCE OF A SENIOR COMPANY REPRESENTATIVE ALSO SEEMS DESIRABLE TO US AS LONG AS MRS. NIEHOUS CHOOSES TO STAY IN CARACAS. FINALLY, THE EMBASSY HOPES THAT O-I WILL KEEP US FULLY INFORMED OF ITS CONTACTS WITH THE GOV. ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR THE COMPANY, WE MAY BE ABLE TO ASSIST IN PREVENTING FURTHER BREAKDOWNS IN COMMUNICATION.

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